

## Blurry Eyes or Ballistic Blood Pressure?

Many a patient has learned a life-saving lesson in their eye doctor's exam chair. That lesson? Eye exams can do a lot more than produce a prescription for eyewear. We talked with doctor Rick Corcoran, O.D., of Marina, Calif., about one such patient's experience. Who'd come in complaining of blurry vision – but there was a lot more at work.

"This patient was a 52-year-old sheet metal worker, and what I saw on his retina was a flame-shaped hemorrhage," Dr. Corcoran recalls today. "His left retina was actually covered with blood, and the flame shape told me that the bleeding was probably a symptom of high blood pressure."

Like any good doctor, Dr. Corcoran had gotten to know his patient a bit, and knew the man was being monitored for hypertension (a.k.a. high blood pressure.) But, he wasn't on medication, and hadn't visited his regular doctor in about eight months.

“He was essentially blind in one eye, and that was all I needed to see.”

The blood was actually covering the macula – that's the all-important light-sensing retina tissue. A quick inspection later, and the doctor knew his patient's vision had gotten bad in his left eye. Legally blind bad – at 20/200.

"He was essentially blind in one eye, and that was all I needed to see," remembers Dr. Corcoran. "At that point, I was pretty sure I was looking at a sign of extremely high blood pressure."

Calling the patient "a heart attack or stroke just waiting to happen," Dr. Corcoran didn't waste any time with next steps.

He didn't want to scare the guy, but the doctor urged him to get to his family doctor and a retinal specialist that very day. The patient followed doctor orders and did just that. A few days later, he was having emergency heart bypass surgery. That, to correct the high blood pressure that triggered a blockage in his arteries. He was also put on a regimen of blood pressure-reducing medicine to get that under control.

Dr. Corcoran reports the surgery went well and his patient has a clean bill of health today. "He's back at work and enjoying good health and whenever I see him, he credits me with saving his life. Really, I'm just glad he came in for his regular eye exam that day. As an optometrist, it's nice to know we can often do much more for people than prescribe glasses and contacts.

"It doesn't happen every day . . . but once in a while, you really do feel that you've been able to help save a life."